Using academic development to enhance student engagement

This AUSSE Enhancement Guide makes suggestions about how staff in academic development units can enhance student engagement.
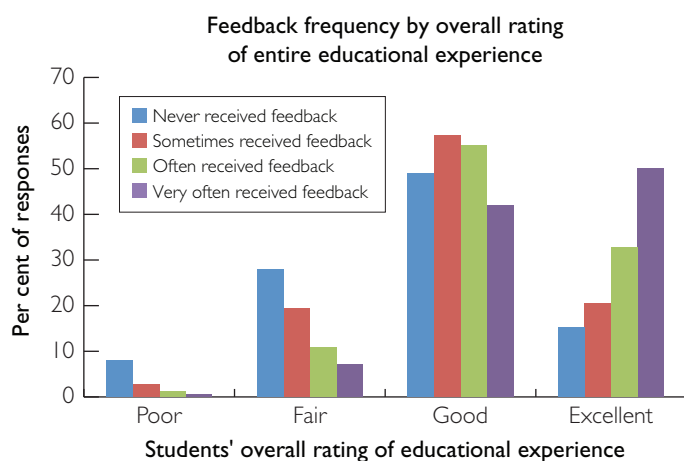
AUSSE

How can academic development units advance student engagement?

The Council of Australian Directors of Academic Development (CADAD) cites seven domains common to many academic development units: strategy and planning, scholarship of teaching and learning, accredited tertiary teaching programs, university engagement, quality enhancement, professional development, and curriculum development. Each is relevant to student engagement.

Incorporate student engagement into strategy and planning processes

Get involved in policy development that can influence student engagement, especially policy about feedback and assessment. Choice in assessment tasks, and a clear vision of what is expected of students, are vital. Ensure assessment is linked to regular formative feedback, and with practices that promote self-reflection on learning. The graph below uses the Australasian data from the 2008 AUSSE to illustrate the relationship between the frequency with which students' report receiving feedback from their teachers on their academic performance and their overall rating of their educational experience at university. As you can see, students who report receiving feedback most frequently are more likely to rate their overall experience as 'excellent'.

Feedback frequency by overall rating of entire educational experience

Be active in developing strategies to enhance student advising and build student support networks. These factors strongly influence the student experience and satisfaction, and ultimately engagement.

Student engagement and the scholarship of teaching and learning

Design large scale projects with student engagement as the focus. Encourage the university to offer teaching and learning development grants or scholarships with engagement as a focus. Lead, facilitate or participate in research into student engagement and what it means in differing contexts. Try cross-faculty comparisons of AUSSE data.

Influence the design of accredited programs for tertiary teaching

Ensure current thinking, practical hints and tips, and student engagement activities, are present in postgraduate certificates for tertiary teaching. Include tasks where participants evaluate their practice in a student engagement context.

Take a whole-of-university approach

Form alliances with student organisations, campus facilities, student support services. Facilitate or partner projects that support student engagement. Build understanding of student engagement and how the university can respond holistically. You might support social and academic activities that bring first year students into sustained contact with other students, senior students, academics and professional staff.

Review quality enhancement frameworks

Align enhancement frameworks with student engagement ideas, principles and data. Populate statements about learning and teaching standards with language and terminology associated with student engagement. Include items on student engagement in teacher, unit and program evaluations. Analyse the data, look for significance, ask what it means.

Offer professional development that profiles student engagement

Good teaching includes consistency, organisation and promoting common values. Facilitate events that build awareness of how engagement impacts on different learner cohorts. Showcase best practice from your own and other universities. Develop capability in using social networking tools and learning management systems to support collaborative learning. Collaborative learning, supported by face-to-face and online activities, encourages formal and informal learning networks. Extend capacity to design and deliver culminating projects, expositions and capstones. These designs mobilise learning into an integrative and synthesised whole.

Bring together curriculum development and student engagement

Good teaching involves detailed, consistent, strategic program design. Advocate collegial approaches to curriculum design, including peer review and collaboration. Incorporate peer review into policy on course and teaching evaluation. Build understanding of how research and inquiry based learning and other experiential approaches advance student engagement. Actively support and profile teachers and professional staff who promote common and shared experiences that foster student belonging. Promote alternative forms of learning focused on attributes and capability, such as community and service learning, and learning beyond the classroom in authentic settings.

About this guide

ACER

Australian Council *for* Educational Research